

MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Regents
From: Board Office
Subject: Early Childhood Study Sponsored by the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School
Date: November 4, 2002

**Recommended
Actions:**

1. Receive the report.
 2. Approve the reinstatement of the Early Childhood Specialist faculty position to provide services to children from birth to kindergarten who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities.
 3. Request that the School work collaboratively with the Iowa Department of Human Services, the Iowa Department of Public Health, and the Iowa Department of Education to collect baseline data regarding the number of children, birth through kindergarten, who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities.
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Background:

In July 2000, the Board of Regents approved a request from the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School to sponsor a statewide study that would focus on identifying the number of preschool children who have visual impairments, the current level of services being provided to these children, and the need for additional services to be provided by the School.

**Proposed
Outcomes of
the Study**

The study was designed to address the following outcomes:

1. Determine the birth rate, number, distribution, age range, and cause of visual impairment and additional disabilities of preschool infants and toddlers in the state.
 2. Determine the present levels of service that these children and their families receive from all sources.
 3. Determine the need for services for this population, with particular emphasis upon family needs.
 4. Review existing models of preschool services in the United States and Canada.
 5. Prepare a recommendation to the Board of Regents regarding the role of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School in providing services to the preschool population.
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Cost of the Study The cost of the study was \$22,734. The funds were obtained from the State Vision Grant/Preschool Funds and the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School/Preschool Funds. The majority of the cost was for expenses related to the data gathering.

Analysis: The Early Childhood Study was sponsored by the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School and conducted by the Center for Social and Behavioral Research (CSBR) at the University of Northern Iowa between December 2000 and April 2002.

Survey Population Self-administered mailed questionnaires were sent to parents with children who are visually impaired and 8 years of age or younger. A total of 215 questionnaires were mailed between March 2001 and June 2001 to parents or guardians who had been identified by their AEA as having children who were visually impaired and 8 years of age or younger. A total of 90 questionnaires were completed and returned, resulting in a return rate of 42%.

Results of the Study **Determine the birth rate, number, distribution, age range, and cause of visual impairment and additional disabilities of preschool infants and toddlers in the state.**

Outcome 1

The study did not determine birth rate. According to the Iowa Department of Public Health and the Iowa Department of Education, there are no statistics gathered from the Department of Public Health regarding the number of infants born in Iowa who are blind or visually impaired. The Iowa Department of Education does not gather data on the basis of disability. Therefore, there are no data on birth rates. IBSSS estimates the number in Iowa to be in excess of 200 birth to kindergarten children who are blind or visually impaired. The distribution is also unknown. The age range was not determined because the questionnaires were sent only to families with children 8 years of age or younger.

According to the respondents, the most frequently reported recent vision diagnosis for their children was Cortical Vision Impairment (27.8%). No visual diagnoses were reported for 12.2% of the children. The majority of the children had at least one additional disability; the mean was 2.1. The most common (89.2%) other disability was being developmentally delayed. Approximately 55% of the children were initially diagnosed before the age of six months; 26.7% were diagnosed between the ages of six months to one year.

Outcome 2

Determine the present levels of services that these children and their families received from all sources.

Families were given a list of service areas and asked to indicate whether they had used those services, what the quality of those services was, and whether they needed additional services in those areas. The list included the following service areas:

- Adaptive technology
- Assessment
- Pre-Braille literacy
- Braille
- Communication skills
- Deaf-blind information
- Multiple disabilities information
- Orientation and mobility
- Self-help skills
- Social skills
- Transition home to preschool (early intervention)
- Transition preschool to school

The service areas with the highest usage included assessment (90.0%); transition home to preschool (early intervention) (86.6%); and orientation and mobility (80.6%). Only two service areas – orientation and mobility and transition home to preschool (early intervention) were rated as high quality by a majority of the respondents, 56.9% and 54.2%, respectively. The only service area for which a majority of the respondents did not indicate a desire for additional services was deaf-blind information.

Outcome 3

Determine the need for services for this population, with particular emphasis upon family needs.

- Services for children with visual impairments and their families should be made better known according to 71.8% of the respondents. These services are known well enough according to 28.2% of the respondents.
 - Approximately 65% of the respondents reported that services for children with visual impairments and their families should be made more available, whereas 35% reported that the services were sufficiently available now.
 - The majority of the respondents to this item reported that they felt there were too few deaf-blindness professionals (59.5%), orientation and mobility professionals (67.2%), and teachers of the visually impaired (71.0%).
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Outcome 4

Review existing models of preschool services in the United States and Canada.

A review of existing models of services was not completed due to budget constraints. However, one of the Committee members, a supervisor of preschool services for the Perkins School for the Blind in Massachusetts, contributed insights based on his experiences.

Outcome 5

Prepare a recommendation to the Board of Regents regarding the role of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School in providing services to the preschool population.

IBSSS has identified an initiative in its 2003-2007 Strategic Plan “to develop early childhood services for children who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities, from birth to kindergarten enrollment, and their families.”

This level of service will provide the following to families of Iowa children who are blind or visually impaired, including those children with additional disabilities:

- Information about the most promising practices for the development of all children who are blind or visually impaired will be readily available to all families in Iowa.
- Leadership will be provided to develop appropriate family support groups in local communities.
- Leadership will be provided to develop a statewide early childhood organization to advocate for services for children.
- Effective lines of communication from families to all service providers, including IBSSS, the State Vision Consultant, the State Deaf-Blind Consultant, the vision supervisors, and the faculty of the Vision Professional Preparation Program at UNI will be established.

IBSSS
Recommendation
for Delivery of
Services

The Early Childhood Study established a basis for developing early childhood services at IBSSS. Such services would be directed toward families rather than solely toward schools. IBSSS proposes to re-establish the Early Childhood Specialist faculty position to deliver these services. Serving more as an “information processor” and less than a “director,” the Early Childhood Specialist would provide services that would be available at non-traditional times, including summers and weekends.

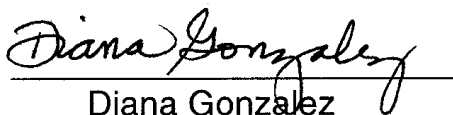
The services would place a strong emphasis on materials, equipment, and information available for young children with multiple disabilities, including visual impairments. Services would foster supporting family groups, creating opportunities to meet with other families, and supporting opportunities for siblings. Initiatives would be available in local areas and resources would be available on campus, including relief care, family and professional development, and family support groups.

Early Childhood
Specialist for
Visually Impaired
Youth (Birth to
Kindergarten)

The Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School requests approval to fill the position of Early Childhood Specialist by July 1, 2003. The faculty position will operate with a non-traditional calendar allowing for major work to be accomplished during the summers and on weekends when families are available to receive services. IBSSS will use its general fund to support this position.

**Board Office
Recommendation**

1. The Board Office recommends that the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School receive approval to fill the position of Early Childhood Specialist in order to provide services to children, birth through kindergarten, who are visually impaired, including those with multiple disabilities.
 2. The School should work collaboratively with the Iowa Department of Human Services, the Iowa Department of Public Health, and the Iowa Department of Education to collect baseline data regarding the number of children, birth through kindergarten, who are visually impaired.
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Diana Gonzalez

Approved: 
Gregory S. Nichols